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ABSTRACT

Cooperation has been repeatedly shown to be one of the best ways to find the most effective methods of helping students learn and develop. Yet only recently have teachers begun to believe that they can best prepare youth for the future by working together. Teachers are powerful role models; what they model in the classroom, students will learn. Closely related to the issue of cooperation and collegiality is the issue of control and monitoring of the implementation of the educational system. Teachers must have direct involvement in decisions affecting the profession if they are to be seen as the important link they are in student education. The first step toward finding solutions to the lack of colleagueship among teachers is for colleagues to talk to each other. Positive changes in the field of education involve all stakeholders in the educational process. Being aware of what is being tried around the country is a good way to get ideas to apply to one's own situation. It is the responsibility of every teacher and administrator to begin the process. They should read and communicate about educational innovations. Teachers must take the responsibility for working cooperatively if they are to include everyone concerned with learning in the total process. (RH)

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We Can Make a Difference:

Teachers in Control

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RUNNING HEAD: Teachers in Control

We Can Make A Difference: Teachers In Control

ABSTRACT

How to solve problems in the school system has been "talked about" for years. As teachers we must stop and look at what is happening now in our classrooms and decide that we can make a difference. We can! By actively working together with administrators, parents, and community personnel change can begin today. We must be alert to the many different programs around the country that are demonstrating success in helping students develop into the capable citizens that they can be, and talk to the colleagues we come in contact with every day. Teaching and learning can and must be enjoyable and stimulating for both student and teacher. By Using the resources available in every community teachers can be the stimulus for change. Progress does not simply appear - we must take the initiative and responsibility to make it happen now.

We Can Make a Difference: Teachers in Control

Solving the ills of education has been an important topic of discussion for educators, the public, business, as well as government for many years. There have been many suggestions for the improvement of our educational system made by individuals and groups from all segments of the population (some of these public concerns are included in the 22nd Annual Gallup Poll(1990)). Many suggestions for change came at first from various levels of government as a response, according to Mary Hatwood Futrell (1989), to the report *A NATION AT RISK*, which defined education as an instrumental value - something to be used to fix the many problems in our society. The solutions presented have been many and varied and in the past ten years have included ideas for changing the educational system from the top down as well as ideas for the general empowering of teachers. It wasn't until about 1986 that discussions really began on what should education be doing to best prepare the youth for the future. Only recently have we, as teachers, begun to actually believe that the way to do this is to, perhaps, work together.

Teachers must stop and look at what is occurring now in the classroom and to examine ways that each teacher can make a difference. It is time, as Linda Lambert (1989) states very well, that teachers begin to work together actively, to improve what we do and how we do it. We can no longer sit back and allow others to tell us how best to do our job.

The Role of the Teacher Must Change

Many of the thoughts and ideas dealing with school reform involve changing the role of the teacher in some way. Many of the basic educational journals such as the Phi Delta Kappan, Educational Leadership, Learning, Instructor, as well as journals in specific subject areas are including frequent articles referring to concepts such as expanding the role of teachers, empowering teachers, or redesigning the plan for education. Taking advantage of and using the cooperative expertise of teachers, administrators, students, parents, as well as other public members of the local community to improve education is a major area of concern, and perhaps the easiest way for us, as teachers, to begin to make our impact obvious.

Cooperation

It seems that professional educators at all levels of schooling are becoming less inclined to work cooperatively with their colleagues. This is a serious problem. Working together has been shown time and time again to be one of the best ways to find the most effective and efficient methods of helping our students learn and develop(Slavin et. al., 1985; Slavin, 1983; Little, 1982), and yet as teachers we often do not demonstrate what we preach.

Research has indicated time and time again that working together results in the greatest gains We know cooperation accomplishes the most productive activity and is a crucial part of true colleagueship and thus of professionalism, and yet we are becoming more and more protective of our "turf." Teachers often spend the entire year in their

own classroom without once asking for or giving advice to another teacher. Why is this and what can we do about correcting the situation? We do not know everything, but seem terribly afraid to admit it. We would not accept this behavior in other professionals. Not many people expect doctors, for example, to just muddle through if they don't know how to treat a patient. We expect and respect them for seeking help and advice from colleagues in order to provide the best possible treatment. How often do we spend hours trying to find the best way to present an idea and then have a colleague put the "right" words on it just from hearing our ideas. Working together does not detract from thinking - it adds. How can we as individual teachers begin the cooperative process and perhaps make some of the ideals of education become closer to reality?

The PBS broadcast, Schools in America: Schools that work (1990), demonstrated dramatically what teachers can do by working together. All of the teachers interviewed made the point that not only does working together and sharing ideas, materials and themselves help students learn, but also increases teacher satisfaction and feeling of professionalism. These four schools also demonstrated the importance of cooperation among all people involved in school, including principal, parents, teachers, and students in forming a real acting partnership.

Teachers Who Teach Are Models

The students in our classrooms are learning much about what they know about achievement and methods of interaction by watching us. If society is to become more accepting of all people and willing to work

together, what better and easier way to help achieve this goal than by having cooperative, happy teachers. Teachers are powerful role models! Don't we want to model success to our students, their parents, and society?

Who is in Control

Closely related to the issue of cooperation and collegiality is the issue of control and monitoring of the implementation of the educational system. This issue certainly affects the quality of collegiality. Individuals who know that their ideas and thoughts are listened to and are valued are more likely to enjoy and to actively engage in working with colleagues toward a mutual goal. Instead of gaining the feeling that we are competent and professional, we read in the newspapers that the SAT scores are declining - due to the failing of the schools. Who is being asked to "fix" the problem? Not teachers, and parents who are in contact with the students, but administrators at all levels. Unfortunately this has often meant that the remedies are more structure and regulations rather than a cooperative examination by all those involved resulting in work toward solutions to improve the system. This "fix" seldom involves the ideas of students, who have the most to gain in the long run!

Also implied is that perhaps teachers aren't competent to be in charge of the profession and so must be told what curriculum to follow, texts to use, tests to give, etc. For teachers to become seen as the important link they are in student education we must have direct involvement in the decisions affecting the profession, beginning at the

local school. Teachers must be seen and treated as professionals. Teachers, administrators, parents, and teacher unions must be involved and must work together as equals to begin to solve the problems that are described as educational problems. No one group of individuals can possibly see and understand all of the problems and/or strengths of the other groups and it will take flexibility from all areas to find avenues of positive change.

Finding Solutions

There are ways to begin to look at problems in our schools and to find possible steps for solutions. Many of the methods for becoming more efficient and more content with teaching are available. By becoming aware of the results and implications of the lack of colleagueship on students and teachers at all levels of learning, we can begin to take control of our profession, and by doing so, to be better able to teach the students in our schools.

Communication

The first step toward finding solutions to the lack of colleagueship is for colleagues to talk to each other. The most powerful learning tool known is language, and through language the problem solving process can begin. Change can begin at the individual level and spread to a faculty as the rewards are seen. Winners in this situation are students, teachers, parents, administrators, community, and society. Ideally there will be several colleagues interested and willing to begin the process. This may, and probably does mean YOU.

Too often we are willing to communicate with others only if they are not too close to us physically. Classroom teachers go to conferences at great distances and talk, listen, reflect, and carry on other components of real communication, and then go back to their home schools and say nothing. This does not make much sense. Be willing and eager to learn from and to help each other in any way possible.

There is Progress

Positive changes are occurring in the field of education. There are a number of "Grassroots" projects around the country that are having a positive effect on teachers and students. Programs in both Hammond, IN and Cerritos, CA, for example, are successful in involving school and public groups by utilizing cooperation. Important to the success of these programs is that they have the support and input from all parties (Casner-Lotto, 1988; Sickler, 1988). One aspect of the Cerritos program is unusual, but very instrumental in maintaining the teachers' morale. The teachers are in control of the curriculum. They decide what will be taught and what is best for the students of their school. Their objectives are not being set by standardized tests, which often happens when teachers are evaluated by looking at the standardized scores of their students. I recently heard of a system in which the future of a gifted and talented program was in jeopardy because the test scores of the students had decreased over the 3-4 years that the students were in the program. Luckily the administrators had been working with the teachers and parents and was aware of the level of learning taking place. The program was allowed to continue without change in emphasis

because the entire educational community had been cooperatively involved with the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program.

Four successful total school programs were demonstrated in the PBS (1990) program mentioned above. All of these programs were similar in that cooperation by school and family was key. Principals in these school were actively involved with parents, students and teachers as equals rather than more important partners. Parents were actively encouraged to take a major role in the planning and operation of the school and were seen as positive working members of the team educating children. The children attending these schools had powerful models and had little choice but to see themselves as capable individuals who could achieve whatever they wanted to.

The Next Step

Being aware of what is being tried around the country is a good way to begin to get ideas for your situation. Teachers need administrators and parents, and administrators need effective teachers and parents in order to provide the best learning opportunities for their students. Working as a team - a professional team - that is knowledgeable about the possibilities for teaching, learning, and communicating and the possible results of these new ideas is a must for progress to occur. Schools that do not simply accept regulation, such as text book selection to match competency tests, because they have decided as a partnership that the students' best interest may not be met by "teaching to the tests", will probably provide an atmosphere that will allow for more learning and for more contented

teachers,administrators,parents, and students. The time to begin is now, and the responsibility lies with every teacher and administrator to begin the process by reading about ideas that are being tried and then communicating with colleagues in their school and/or department concerning what might done to improve the total education experience in their individual schools. We must take the responsibility to begin to make change, and to work cooperatively to include everyone concerned with learning in the total process.

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